

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
WESTERN DIVISION

JAMES H. BEARD, JR.,

Plaintiff,

VS.

No. 16-2262-JDT-cgc

LOAMMA SMITH, ET AL.,

Defendants.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. § 1915

On April 19, 2016, Plaintiff James H. Beard, Jr., a resident of Byhalia, Mississippi¹, filed a *pro se* complaint captioned “Complaint for the Violations of Civil Rights Under 42 U.S.C. § 1983” against LoAmma Smith, Helen Johnson and Ozata Davis, accompanied by a motion seeking leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (Docket Entries (“D.E.”) 1 & 2.) On April 21, 2016, the Court granted Plaintiff’s Motion for Leave to Proceed In Forma Pauperis (D.E. # 5). Plaintiff also filed a Motion and Affidavit to Appoint Counsel (D.E. # 6)²

The complaint, including attachments, is a rambling 113 page document begins with an allegation that

“[the] defendants have conspired to force individuals who are trying to gain sobriety and face life in the courage and faith in God to be the best they can be, to depend on drug dealers, the emotionally perverted, and the criminally insane. The

¹ Plaintiff states at section III.A. of the complaint resides at Byhalia, MS but also provides a Memphis, TN address beneath his signature.

² Because it is recommended that the complaint should be dismissed, this motion (D.E. # 6) is DENIED AS MOOT.

defendants have used coercion, intimidation, verbal and physical attacks, and drugged those who resist their leadership and demands. The defendants has (sic) forced a dependence upon them rather than a dependence on God as dictate (sic) by the book of Alcoholic Anonymous.”

Plaintiff asks that the court prohibit the defendants

“from working with anyone else trying to get off drugs and alcohol. The defendants be placed on probation for a time from attending A.A., C.A., and N.A. meetings. The courts order the dismantling of their network within the food service industry and in our society who are drugging selected individuals who have been marked for extortion. The defendants are to pay \$111,000,000 one hundred eleven million dollars in restitution, damages, pain and emotional suffering.”

The Court is required to screen *in forma pauperis* complaints and to dismiss any complaint, or any portion thereof, if the action—

- (i) is frivolous or malicious;
- (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or
- (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2).

In assessing whether the complaint in this case states a claim on which relief may be granted, the Court applies the standards under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), as stated in Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009), and in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007). Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010). “Accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, the Court ‘consider[s] the factual allegations in [the] complaint to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.’” Williams v. Curtin, 631 F.3d 380, 383 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 681) (alteration in original). “[P]leadings that . . . are no more than conclusions are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While

legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations.” Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 679; *see also* Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555 n.3 (“Rule 8(a)(2) still requires a ‘showing,’ rather than a blanket assertion, of entitlement to relief. Without some factual allegation in the complaint, it is hard to see how a claimant could satisfy the requirement of providing not only ‘fair notice’ of the nature of the claim, but also ‘grounds’ on which the claim rests.”).

“A complaint can be frivolous either factually or legally. Any complaint that is legally frivolous would *ipso facto* fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” Hill, 630 F.3d at 470 (citing Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 328-29 (1989)).

Whether a complaint is factually frivolous under §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) is a separate issue from whether it fails to state a claim for relief. Statutes allowing a complaint to be dismissed as frivolous give “judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless.” Neitzke, 490 U.S. at 327, 109 S. Ct. 1827 (interpreting 28 U.S.C. § 1915). Unlike a dismissal for failure to state a claim, where a judge must accept all factual allegations as true, Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. at 1949-50, a judge does not have to accept “fantastic or delusional” factual allegations as true in prisoner complaints that are reviewed for frivolousness. Neitzke, 490 U.S. at 327-28, 109 S. Ct. 1827.

Id. at 471.

“*Pro se* complaints are to be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers, and should therefore be liberally construed.” Williams, 631 F.3d at 383 (internal quotation marks omitted). *Pro se* litigants, however, are not exempt from the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Wells v. Brown, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989); *see also* Brown v. Matauszak, 415 F. App’x 608, 613 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[A] court cannot create a claim which [a plaintiff] has not spelled out in his pleading”) (internal quotation marks omitted); Payne

v. Secretary of Treas., 73 F. App'x 836, 837 (6th Cir. 2003) (affirming *sua sponte* dismissal of complaint pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) and stating, “[n]either this court nor the district court is required to create Payne’s claim for her”); *cf.* Pliler v. Ford, 542 U.S. 225, 231 (2004) (“District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to *pro se* litigants.”); Young Bok Song v. Gipson, 423 F. App'x 506, 510 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[W]e decline to affirmatively require courts to ferret out the strongest cause of action on behalf of *pro se* litigants. Not only would that duty be overly burdensome, it would transform the courts from neutral arbiters of disputes into advocates for a particular party. While courts are properly charged with protecting the rights of all who come before it, that responsibility does not encompass advising litigants as to what legal theories they should pursue.”), *cert. denied*, ___ U.S. ___, 132 S. Ct. 461 (2011).

Plaintiff’s complaint does not comply with Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(1), which requires that “[a] pleading that states a claim for relief” contain “a short and plain statement of the grounds for the court’s jurisdiction.” The instant complaint does not include any jurisdictional allegations beyond a brief mention of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983,³ a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) a deprivation of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States (2) committed by a defendant acting under color of state law. Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co., 398 U.S. 144, 150 (1970). Plaintiff has not stated in the Complaint in what manner

³ Section 1983 provides: Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

Defendants were acting under color of state law and what actions Defendants took to deprive Plaintiff of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States.

A complaint violates these provisions when it “is so verbose that the Court cannot identify with clarity the claim(s) of the pleader and adjudicate such claim(s) understandingly on the merits.” Harrell v. Dirs. of Bur. of Narcotics & Dangerous Drugs, 70 F.R.D. 444, 446 (E.D. Tenn. 1975); see also Flayter v. Wis. Dep’t of Corr., 16 F. App’x 507, 509 (7th Cir. 2001) (dismissing 116-page complaint pursuant to Rule 8(a)(2)); Vicom v. Harbridge Merch. Servs., Inc., 20 F.3d 771, 775-76 (7th Cir. 1994) (criticizing district court for declining to dismiss amended complaint with prejudice pursuant to Rule 8(a) and noting that “[a] complaint that is prolix and/or confusing makes it difficult for the defendant to file a responsive pleading and makes it difficult for the trial court to conduct orderly litigation)

Plaintiff’s complaint is incomprehensible. The filing does not assert any coherent claim against any person or entity under any colorable legal theory. The Court is not obligated to construct Plaintiff’s case for him.

Therefore, it is RECOMMENDED that the Court DISMISS the complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief may be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)-(ii).

The Court must also consider whether Plaintiff should be allowed to appeal this decision *in forma pauperis*, should he seek to do so. The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit requires that all district courts in the circuit determine, in all cases where the appellant seeks to proceed *in forma pauperis*, whether the appeal would be frivolous. Twenty-eight U.S.C. §

1915(a)(3) provides that “[a]n appeal may not be taken *in forma pauperis* if the trial court certifies in writing that it is not taken in good faith.”

The good faith standard is an objective one. Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). The test under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) for whether an appeal is taken in good faith is whether the litigant seeks appellate review of any issue that is not frivolous. Id. It would be inconsistent for a district court to determine that a complaint should be dismissed prior to service on the defendants, but has sufficient merit to support an appeal *in forma pauperis*. See Williams v. Kullman, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983). The same considerations that lead the Court to recommend dismissal of this case for failure to state a claim also compel the conclusion that an appeal would not be taken in good faith. It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the Court CERTIFY, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3), that any appeal in this matter by Plaintiff would not be taken in good faith and Plaintiff may not proceed on appeal *in forma pauperis*.

Signed this 18th day of January, 2017.

s/ Charmiane G. Claxton
CHARMIANE G. CLAXTON
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

ANY OBJECTIONS OR EXCEPTIONS TO THIS REPORT MUST BE FILED WITHIN FOURTEEN (14) DAYS AFTER BEING SERVED WITH A COPY OF THE REPORT. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C). FAILURE TO FILE SAID OBJECTIONS OR EXCEPTIONS WITHIN FOURTEEN (14) DAYS MAY CONSTITUTE A WAIVER OF OBJECTIONS, EXCEPTIONS, AND ANY FURTHER APPEAL.